## Jeffrey Kent

## **Artist's Statement**



Dry Countries: The Perceptions of Africa Series #2 30"x 24", mixed media, acrylic, collage, oil stick on canvas 2012. Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Myrtis

The paintings in the *Perceptions of Africa* series respond to the idea of truth and its meaning: *that which is true or in accordance with fact or reality.*Drawing from an urban prospective and life experiences, the Renaissance paintings featured in the Walters Art Museum "Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe" become the backdrop for my exploration of the stereotyping and prejudicial treatment of Africans and the notion of "blackness" in contemporary and renaissance societies.

In the second painting in the series, *Dry Countries*, as in all the other paintings, I use satire to address the effort by Europeans to strip Africa of its greatest resource, its rich unique cultures. The camel with zebra stripes signifies that historical tales are not always as they are told. The bigotry and insidious stereotyping of Africans resulted from the European's ignorance of the historical cultures and traditions of Africa and the peoples.

The spray bottle, a recurring theme throughout the series, symbolizes the effort by Europeans to "cleanse" the Africans and "wipeout" their culture while requiring them to confirm to Renaissance norms of dress and behavior.



Cosmographia open to "Map of Africa." Map #13 Courtesy Walters Art Museum

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## **Artist's Statement**



Black Mannequins: Perceptions of Africa Series #3 29" x 29", acrylic and collage on canvas, 2012. Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Myrtis

The third painting in the series, *Black Mannequins* is informed by my trip to Italy (Sicily); in it, I address the perception of wealth and notion of "blackness".

During my visit to Italy, on rare occasions I encountered people from the African diaspora. They earned their living washing car windows or assisting party patrons with directions into a parking space for money. In stark contrast to the appearance of their economic and social status were "black-faced" baby mannequins wearing Ferrari outfits. These image of "blackness" served as a symbol of wealth. They were displayed in store windows of high-end fashion toddler boutiques. Its clientele would not be the Africans the mannequins served to emulate for they could not afford the wears. It would be the patrons the Africans served as window washers and valet.

I juxtaposed the Ferrari toddler mannequins with that of the Africans of nobility. Like that of the mannequins, they are adorned with garments that serve as a symbol of their wealth, power and social status.



